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October 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Talk by Ernesto Betancourt at the Cooperative Forum.

1. This is a report from memory of the highlights of the talk given by Dr. Ernesto Betancourt, Wednesday night, 26 September 1962, and of the question and answer period following it, at the Cooperative Forum in Washington, D.C.

2. Dr. Betancourt was announced as the political adviser of Ejercito Libertador de Cuba, "an organization of young Cuban military leaders in exile." Currently his full time occupation was stated as that of a coordinator in the Department of Economic Affairs of the Organization of American States (OAS). In the early days of the Castro regime he had been an enthusiastic "Fidelista" and had served as Director of the Central Bank of Cuba (pre Che Guevarra) and as one of Castro's first representatives in the U. S. He soon became disenchanted, defected and became a leader in the anti-Castro movement.

3. Based on mental notes of Betancourt's speech (about 40 minutes) and of his answers given to questions from the audience (a typical, distinguished cross-section group found at the Forum), the following appeared to be the most significant statements:

- a. There are no "easy" answers to the Cuban problem which has become increasingly complex.
- b. The singly most important Soviet objective in "taking over" Cuba is to discredit the U. S. by alternately demonstrating its "weakness" and its "wickedness." By showing that the U.S. is willing to remain supine even in the face of a military-aid "presence" in Cuba, the Soviets believe they can score a psychological victory which will impress other Latin American countries and perhaps other developing areas in which the U. S. has an interest. Simultaneously the Communists continue to depict the "gringos" as crass, money-seeking imperialists who want to "do in" poor little Cuba. This creation of an unfavorable image of the U. S. is far more important to the Kremlin than any other reason for their now large Cuban effort. Even the possible use of Cuba as a missile base is of secondary importance.
- c. As for making Cuba a Communist "showcase" Betancourt believes the Soviets have no such hope or even intention. They do however intend to use Cuba as the CP "headquarters" for Latin America and have in fact been doing so for some time.
- d. The attempted invasion was a disaster all around - militarily, politically and ideologically. Among other causes of this failure was CIA's "kidnapping" of the Revolutionary Council so that any effective anti-Castro leadership was rendered powerless.



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- e. The "bungling" of the invasion was in part due to the "communications void" that existed so far as getting anti-Castro information through to the Cuban people. In the meantime Castro had full control over his internal communications and "saturated" the air waves with pro-regime propaganda concerning the invasion.
- f. Castro is still the real "boss" in Cuba even though he is surrounded by Communists and is generally obedient to Moscow's orders. The Kremlin has not pushed him too far - in fact they have in some instances pulled him back for they feel that he has a tendency to be reckless. For instance, the Soviets did not really want him to break with the U. S. and would have wanted him to be a clever "Marxist" tactician. This Kremlin is smart enough to realize, however, that if Castro were eliminated his entire regime would collapse. So while dictating to him in certain respects, they also have to give him leeway. In other words the Communists are "using" Castro but at the same time are being used by him for the achievement of his own ego-power objectives.
- g. Economic conditions in Cuba are really very bad. In the general disarray of the Cuban economy, agriculture is faring worst of all. For the first time in Cuban history, food is being severely rationed. Also for the first time the sugar crop has not been planted this year, due to the general disorder and the inability to provide incentives for the sugar plantation peons. Soviet economic aid is insufficient thus far to have any visible effect in lifting the economy. The Soviets are apparently giving much more military than economic aid.
- h. Betancourt is opposed to military intervention by U. S. on general principles but feels that if the U. S. did decide to intervene it would be far more justified in the eyes of Latin-America than would have been the case before the Soviets decided to intervene militarily.
- i. One of the best propaganda targets from the U.S. point of view is the Castro militia. According to Betancourt the militiamen are "restive" about the Communist domination of Cuba. A large number of these men were ardent rebels but not Communists. They fought with Castro against the Batista dictatorship but not in order to establish a Communist regime, nor even to make Cuba a "socialist" state.

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These militiamen would be much more responsive to U. S. appeals if they did not feel that in the event of anti-Castro take over they would be liquidated. They feel that the U. S. and rebel propaganda has depicted them all as major enemies and immediate targets for destruction. Betancourt believes we should proceed to correct this propaganda error at once.

j. Betancourt feels that the OAS could be much more effective than it has been so far if only as a forum for airing the truth about the Castro regime and for hardening the attitudes of the rest of Latin America toward the expansion of Soviet satellites in the Western hemisphere. Betancourt believes that the overt Soviet intervention in Cuba has jarred the Latin Americans for more than the fact of the triumph of Communism, per se, in that country.

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[ALDO L. RAFFA]

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